

Narrative by Niloofar Mina

Here is another view from downtown New York: A week has passed but I am still engulfed in depression and anxiety and do not quite understand why. On Wednesday night, the day after the bombing, as we were driving out of the city to escape the confusion and smoke in my downtown neighborhood, the sight of the empty streets, army vehicles, and the refrigerated trucks on the road reminded me of the period of revolution in Iran. I think part of my fear stemmed from my experience of exile. The events that lead to my present life in downtown New York became once again vivid. I felt I could not bear moving again. There is an unbelievable force and power witnessing thousands die in front of you. And I saw it happen! I was riding my bike along the Hudson River to my school's swimming pool at around 9. I was pretty close to the WTC. By the time I [reached] my school the second tower was hit and people were rushing uptown, filling up the bike path along the river. At school the pool was closed, so, I went to the Battery Park City, across the street, to see what was developing. The twin buildings were on fire. But all the surroundings were normal, just two buildings on fire. People from Wall Street were sitting in the park to take a breath, talking about bodies, falling off the top of the twin towers. From there I could see the black shadows falling off the buildings. People were standing there in disbelief. Some had brought out their telescopes from their apartments in Battery Park City to look closer. I rode my bike closer, opposite the world financial center, near the boats. I was thinking of all the people trapped, and looking at the towers like two torches, on fire. We were all transfixed; did not think that we should really be moving away from there. The area was full of people just looking up in astonishment and horror. I do not think it occurred to anyone that the buildings might collapse or pose any danger to the surrounding area. But suddenly the South tower collapsed. It was unbelievable. It looked as if the top of the building was sliding off of it and coming toward us. But the building immediately disappeared in a white cloud and now the cloud was rushing to us. I looked up at the buildings right above me. In a flash I realized that they too were about to collapse or at the

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least the windows were sure to break on top of us. When the cloud reached us in a matter of seconds, the air was all white with small white particles in it. We could not breathe or see beyond our nose. I could not breath, things were falling from above and people were saying confusing things: like lie on the floor. Go to the right, no, left! There was a middle aged Wall Street CEO type within my field of vision. He was on the floor, hurt. I could not reach to help him. I was holding on to my bike and contemplating a jump in the Hudson River. At least I won't be burned. For a short while I was essentially immobile, thinking that we were all about to die and there is little we can do about it. There was nothing to hide under. It was scary and unbelievable, strange. Like a Godzilla movie. I decided to get off the ground and walk up north through the park and to the West side highway, along the river. It was a good decision, because the pictures now show that area to be covered with metal and glass from the American Express Building. There were kids trapped in the Stuyvesant school engulfed in smoke. But I could not linger to help. The police kept pushing us to move. A sea of people moving slowly. Once on the highway I jumped on my bike and left the area. Right as I reached home the other building collapsed. People were screaming on the street right outside my window. I looked out and saw the second building reduced to smoke. Everything was covered with building particles, glass and smoke. By the next day my neighborhood was sealed off and the air was full of smoke and chemical vapors. I realized that when confronted with human loss political and cultural differences disappear. I felt for the WTC victims the same way I feel for the continuing plight of the Palestinian people, the people of Iraq, and for the over 2 million Iranian and Iraqi people who were killed in a war that was used by the US to destabilize and devastate the Gulf region and fund terrorist groups in Central America. A war that took the lives of many of my friends. This is precisely the reason why the current talks of revenge and war, and the patriotic sentiments forced on the American people scare me. Clearly, violence diminishes us.